

John 31 – The Work of the Son

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Scripture 1: (Jn. 5:16-30 ESV)

And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Sermon:

After healing the paralytic at Bethesda, the evangelist explains that “...*the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.*”; because Jesus was engaging in righteous acts of mercy and justice on the Sabbath; because Jesus was not content to just sit and “do nothing” on the Sabbath and comply with their man-made regulations and traditions; because Jesus understood that the command to “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*” (Exod. 20:8 ESV) is as much about doing good things for God's glory: doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8); as it is about refraining from working for our own benefit and pleasure.

- There is a very strange thing about religiosity, whether it is of a Jewish or a Christian flavor: pious religiosity loves to transform devotional self denial into self righteous pride.

This is a charge contemporary Christians frequently levy against the Pharisees, as did Jesus, but this same charge may also be brought against Christians who fall into the trap of Legalism.

Next John announces another, more serious charge against Jesus, “*This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*”. Any person, but especially a Jewish person, who claims equality with God is obviously guilty of blasphemy; unless He actually is God. However, in John's Gospel and unlike the Synoptics, the evangelist does not portray Jesus as being very shy about proclaiming His divinity. Here, Jesus is openly claiming to be God the Son.

Now this is the first time in this Gospel that Jesus claims the LORD as His Father, saying “*But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."*”, although it was implied earlier. The two previous implications that you will recall, were a part of the Evangelist's opening and closing introductory commentaries (1:14, 3:36). Now Jesus is clearly speaking and now He is really beginning to upset the strict religious elite because Jesus is claiming equality of “likeness” (of similarity) between Himself and the LORD, as well as equality through the continuity of activity between the LORD and Himself.

- Saying, “*My Father is working until now, and I am working.*”, suggests that Jesus is picking up and continuing to work from wherever the LORD might have left off; equating both His capacity and activity to God's.

However, as controversial as this statement is on its own, it was merely the first salvo of Jesus declaring **who** He is and **what** His work is. Jesus will now assert His specific equality and union with the LORD in regards to:

- His activity;
- His ability to give life and His inherent, natural possession of life within Himself;
- His reception of and His deserved-ness to receive honor; and,
- His sovereign authority to enact justice and judgment: as condemnation or as justification.

This last example, the authority of Jesus to dispense justice, is an attribute of our Savior that inspires terror in all the wicked (everyone living apart from Christ) and inspires joy within all His righteous Elect (all who are united into Christ and adopted into the family of God as His holy children). This judicial authority is the specific divine work that Jesus is now laying claim to.

Something peculiar to Jesus' recorded speeches in John's Gospel is this precise expression, “*Truly, truly, I say to you...*” (used 25 times). The repetitive “*Truly, truly*” presents a unique verbal emphasis, translating the Hebrew term *amen* (essentially meaning “Let this be true”), and is assertively used by Jesus to call close attention to very important statements of truth. Here in this passage, there are three instances of Him saying “*Truly, truly...*”. Each instance identifies an important point concerning the judicial work of Christ.

Yet, before we look at these three points, we need to be reminded of what this work of “judgment” actually is, and the context whereby Jesus and John are using it.

1. Remember the conclusion of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said “*And this is the **judgment**: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.*” (Jn. 3:19-21 ESV); and,
2. The word translated as judgment, in both chapter 3 and here in chapter 5, is the Greek *krisis*, a word which simply means “a decision” or “to decide”, but is also used to describe negative outcomes of “judgment”, like condemnation or damnation (as the King James translates 5:24 and 5:29).

Considering the judicial work of Christ, we must begin by confessing that everyone will be judged (*krisis*) by Jesus (Revelation 20:11:-15) when all of the evil and wicked who love the darkness will be judged and condemned, while all of those who do what is true and who come to the light will be judged and justified.

Following up His initial claim of unity, equality, and continuity with His Father, the LORD, Jesus authoritatively speaks, expounding upon a particular quality and practice of their relationship. “*So Jesus said to them, “**Truly, truly**, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.*” What Jesus describes is Christian discipleship; how He learned from the Father by following His example; by copying and echoing “... *whatever the Father does...*”.

- Jesus used this is the same method of imitation when teaching His disciples.
- Imitation is the method commanded by the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20, to make disciples by teaching them and demonstrating all that Christ commanded; disciples who will then go out and make more disciples in turn, making them the same way.
- The Apostle Paul also commends this method and practice to the Corinthian church, writing “*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*” (1 Cor. 11:1 ESV).
- Clearly, this is the way.

Then Jesus explains why He was discipled by the Father, because “...*the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.*”. So, it is because of the Father's love for the Son that Jesus also discipled His followers because of His love for them particularly; a love which flows through Him from its original source: the Father, to the Apostles, and down through the ages to us, today.

Now immediately after two miraculous healing's; the royal official's dying son and the man who had lived for thirty-eight years in invalidity; Jesus asserts that, “*And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.*” proclaiming that His ability and willingness to “heal” and “repair” the living is just the tip of the iceberg. Jesus

is saying, “You ain't seen nothing yet!” (Bachman-Turner Overdrive, BTO) and that when everyone sees and realizes the truth, then they would “*marvel*”. By this, Jesus claims to be equal with God by being able to bestow and restore life as the one who created all life, in the first place; an ability which will be proven with His friend, Lazarus (John 11).

Then Jesus declares something that should be surprising to us all, “*For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.*”. Surprise! The LORD, God Almighty; the Holy Lawgiver; the Sovereign Creator of the Universe IS NOT the supreme and universal Judge of mankind. Who expected that?

I must admit, that when I encountered this passage of John during seminary and read this, I was surprised and shocked. It was as if I was reading or hearing these things for the first time, but this was only the first of two things that surprised me in this passage.

However, because the Son is equal with His Father, the LORD God, this idea that the Father delegated judicial authority to the Son, merely represents a shift in the attitude of our relationship with Christ, rather than a shift in Their actual authority.

- The Son is given this power and responsibility of judgment to bring glory to the Father, as the perfectly just Judge.
- The Son has this power and responsibility of judgment, to decide the disposition of all creation, as the Creator, because it was by and through Him that all things were made.
 - Does not a potter have the power of judgment: of decision; over the clay?
 - Whether to set it for honorable or dishonorable use?
 - Whether to treasure it as a valued possession, or to destroy it and smash it into shards of refuse? (Jeremiah 18; Romans 9:21)
- The Son is given the authority and right to judge all people, so that they may honor Him as they should honor the Father; because by honoring Him, they honor the Father. The Father and Son are perfectly united and equal, therefore, because they so perfectly share their honor and glory, it flows through one to the other.

Back in verse 17, when Jesus first described the LORD as His Father, it would have been something unorthodox for a Jew of the 1st Century to say but, it would not necessarily have been blasphemy. However, what Jesus has been describing presents an understanding which, to the mind of an orthodox Jew, was approaching blasphemy. Then, Jesus crossed the line. Not only did He cross the line, but Jesus jumped right passed it and did not look back afterwards, saying “***Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.***”.

Previously, whenever Jesus mentioned the “Son of Man”, we know that He was implying that He is the “Son of Man”, yet He never said it or claimed the title outright (1:51 and 3:16-18). He always left Himself “plausible deniability”, while allowing others to make the assertion about Him (as the Evangelist in 1:14, the Baptist in 1:34, and Nathanael in 1:49). But now, after just describing the flow of activity, power, authority and honor within the relationship of the divine Father and Son, Jesus declares Himself to be the very Son He just described.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

- Jesus' word is God's Word. He has been acknowledged as having come from God by Nicodemus (3:2), bringing a message from the divine.
- That whoever hears Him and believes His message, believes the LORD who sent Him and His message.
- Therefore, whoever hears and believes; whoever has *pisteuo*, faith, in the LORD, in Jesus Christ and His message, possesses eternal life.

However, those who believe in and trust Christ will still be judged, but they will not “*come into condemnation*”, as the King James says, because according to their faith, they have “...*passed from death to life*”. They have already been judged and their deserved condemnation has been suffered by Jesus on the cross. They have already been passed through the *krisis* and are justified by Jesus Christ. Therefore,

- As the Son, Jesus is the Judge: condemning the unrepentant wicked and justifying as righteous, those who are *anohen*: those who are “*born again*” (3:3) and are living out active, *pisteuo* faith as evidenced by the good fruit of repentance and works of mercy (3:21).
 - As the Judge, Jesus dispenses justice by condemning the wicked; and He dispenses mercy and grace by justifying those who are *anohen*.

But we must remember, that mercy and grace have no relation to justice. They are neither just nor unjust. They are not “fair” because they are non-justice; something apart from and unrelated to something deserved.

Then, after having claimed this authority as God's Son, Jesus proclaims the imminence of the judgment, declaring “*Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.*” proclaiming both regeneration and the hope of the resurrection because the authoritative Word of Christ is the Word of life;

- as “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be **light**," and there was **light**.*” (Gen. 1:1-3 ESV); and,
- as “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the **light** of men.*” (Jn. 1:1-4 ESV)

This is also another element of His unity and equality with the LORD, “*For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.*”. Now, only the living can impart life and every effect must have an antecedent cause, so when we follow both of these chains (of life begetting life and of “Cause and Effect”) back through history, both must logically end at the beginning at a living Person (alive without a without any prior cause) who naturally possesses life within themselves, and is the true “First Cause” and the source of all subsequent life. Being the LORD God, just as the Father has this quality (or attribute) of life within Himself, by nature, so too the Son has this same quality of life within Himself, by nature. Possessing life within Himself naturally, precludes the possibility of the Son having been created. Therefore, it is through our understanding of this unity and quality between the Father and the Son, that we recognize the sameness of their “substance” (Nicene Creed's – *homoousia*; “of one substance with the Father”), or “essence” and express the Son's relationship to the Father as the “only begotten” (*monogenes*) Son; as the only divine Son of God.

Therefore, when Jesus speaks everyone, the living and the dead, will listen and respond because the Father, “...has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.”. They must listen and they must obey out of respect for His authority.

We know that the “Son of Man” is sourced from Daniel's vision, “*I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. **And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.**” (Dan. 7:13-14 ESV) and now the expression is being used as the Old Testament source for Jesus's claim of judicial authority, whereas it was merely implied in the other Gospels. This is also the first occasion in the Gospels where the “Son of Man” and “Son of God” are identified as the same person, and where Jesus claims to be that Person.*

- This was big. This was explosive! This was controversial and should justly upset the Jews because, in their opinion, this was BLASPHEMY; unless of course, it is true.
- But wait, there is more! Jesus declares something else that was even more surprising to His hearers, something stepping up from their “vague” expectations about the resurrection.

“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”.

When I encountered this passage during seminary, this was the second thing that really surprised me, because Jesus is announcing a universal resurrection. To be fair, before reading this I had never really read or heard much of anything about the resurrection except that it is the future of every Christian. I had never given much thought about what happens to those outside of Christ, beyond having a negative and undesirable impression about conditions in Hell.

I expect that this idea of universal resurrection is surprising to most of us here because the resurrection is not something that we often spend much time talking about, even during funerals when the topic should obviously be on our mind. Since we hardly say anything about the resurrection beyond the mere hope of it, how can we really hope for something if we do not know much about it?

- Perhaps we do not spend enough time talking about our future hope, as Christians, because we are over-correcting for those who spend too much time talking about, thinking about, and arguing about the exact circumstances of “The End” and ignoring our eternal life beyond it.

I am not sure, but I believe our “silence” on this issue has resulted in us being unprepared for dying; causing us to lose much of the comfort, peace, and joy that we should experience during those times because of our hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Having a better expectation about what is to come and the blessed benefits we anticipate receiving, helps us to avoid (or at least lessen) our anxiety and fears about dying. So, we should want to know more, to have a better expectation about it, because everything we know concerning what is yet to come, are promises that Jesus Christ has given us for our benefit. But those details are something we will consider at a later time because for now, we are just focusing on the simple fact of the resurrection.

If you are like me, then you probably find this idea of universal resurrection surprising because much of contemporary Christianity generally teaches that only Christians will be resurrected; we might call it the “resurrection of the just” or “the good”. **{Or, very wrongly, Evangelicalism often teaches that everyone will be raised and go to heaven simply because they are, as RC Sproul called it, effectively “justified by**

death”; sanctified and beatified merely because they died. But that is an ancient heresy known as universalism and it is often an extreme consequence of Arminianism.^{1}}

But, if we honestly believe Scripture: particularly these words of Jesus and the description of the day of judgment that John provides in Revelation 20:11-15; then universal resurrection is a logical necessity **{and universal salvation is a logical impossibility}** because just as life precedes death, resurrection must precede the judgment since, as the writer of Hebrews tells us, “*And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*” (Heb. 9:27-28 ESV), and someone who is dead cannot rightly be judged **{and Scripture plainly declares that some number will surely be condemned}**. Furthermore, it is logical that only someone who gives life may justly impose a sentence of death, because they are the only One who could correct any possible error (could repair a miscarriage of justice). We find this principle described by J.R.R. Tolkien through a conversation between Gandalf and Frodo concerning Gollum, where Gandalf tells Frodo, “Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to death out death in judgment.” (The Fellowship of the Ring).

Therefore, what Jesus says here is the same as what John later describes in the Revelation; that all of the dead shall be raised: all of the Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, atheists, and pagans will be resurrected; and that everyone will then be righteously judged by God the Son:

- those who do evil will be judged and condemned, and then cast into the lake of fire (21:8), a place of torment where they will be dying eternally, without utter annihilation, as the righteous consequence for their wickedness in this life.
 - This is what He means by the “*resurrection of judgment*”;
- while those who do good shall be judged and justified by their active *pistewo* faith in the LORD, Jesus Christ, and then, after receiving the mercy of God and forgiveness for their sins, they shall be ushered into the eternal Kingdom of Christ, to forever dwell within the New Heavens and New Earth in the presence of God, because of the imputed righteousness of Christ.
 - This is what He means by the “*resurrection of life*”.

This is the most surprising and shocking part: the realization that since everyone is raised, everyone gets eternal life. The only difference between those who are good or evil after their judgment, is their final destination; where they shall spend their eternal life.

- So, where do you want, hope, or expect to spend your eternal life?

This idea that judgment will follow our death is something that should concern every human person because: whether it is in hope or fear for the consequences of judgment; it will be influenced by our relationship with the judge.

- If a person does not have a personal relationship with the judge, then they should rightly be nervous because the best they can hope for is justice.

1 “I’m afraid that in the United States of America today the prevailing doctrine of justification is not justification by faith alone. It is not even justification by good works or by a combination of faith and works. The prevailing notion of justification in our culture today is justification by death. All one has to do to be received into the everlasting arms of God is to die.” - RC Sproul, Saved from What?

- Whereas, if a person does have a personal relationship with the judge, then they MIGHT have a hope for mercy.

But the good news is we may be confident of the standard of justice because Jesus admits that He is not, and will not be, an arbitrary judge, saying “*I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.*”. Jesus professes that His judgment is, and will be, just because He does not use His own standard (“*[His] own will*”). Instead He confesses that He is using a known and accepted standard: the standard of “*...the will of him who sent me.*”, which is the Torah, the “Moral Law”. Therefore, we all may know the standard by which we will be judged; even those who may not possess or affirm the “Law of Moses”, still know this standard because it is written on the heart of every person and they are justly condemned by their own conscience (Romans 2:15). Everyone who examines himself honestly, must admit that they have not kept this moral law perfectly:

- they must admit their guilt to themselves and before God;
- they must admit that they have no hope in themselves, to stand before the divine judge, and assert their own righteousness;
 - their only hope of being justified on the day of judgment is to assert that they are trusting in the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

This is part of why Christians often talk about having a personal relationship with Christ because our relationship is the consequence of our faith in Him. It is a relationship of dependence and trust. We depend on Him, alone and entirely, for our justification and for the forgiveness of our sins, so that we may “*...not come into judgment...*”; so that we may surely be “*...passed from death to life.*”. That is our ultimate hope and the greatest promise of Christ for Christians; that we will be passed from death to life eternal in Christ's Kingdom.

Finally, there are two points of certainty that we should take away from this passage, today:

- the certainty of a universal resurrection followed by judgment according to the righteous standard of the LORD; and,
- the certainty of our Christian hope, by our faith in Jesus Christ, that we will pass through the judgment because we are justified by the blood of Christ.

Remember, every cause has an effect. Every action has a reaction and predictable consequences. If there is any absolute standard of righteousness, then the natural consequence of having a standard must be the plain fact of judgment: a judgment that one is either righteous or wicked.

Fortunately, if you trust in Jesus Christ as your LORD and your Savior; if you have a personal relationship with Him: as your elder Brother, friend, and as your King; then, you may be confident that you will pass through the judgment; then, you may be assured of your salvation through your faith in Jesus Christ alone, by the grace of God alone, for His glory alone, according to the Word of Scripture alone.

Hear the Words of Jesus, believe them and follow them, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*”.

So, believe that good news. Trust that good news and be assured of your salvation.

AMEN